

CENTRAL BASIN MUNICIPAL WATER DISTRICT

NOVEMBER 4, 2010 - Communications

Montalvo, Apodaca

NOVEMBER 10, 2010 - Sp. Board Meeting

Prepared by: Valerie Howard

Submitted by: Valerie Howard

Approved by: Art Aguilar

ACTION CALENDAR

CENTRAL BASIN NEWS DIVISION PILOT PROGRAM

SUMMARY:

For years, one of the primary focuses of the Public Affairs Department has been to establish and maintain positive working relationships with the local media to help ensure coverage of important District projects, events and accomplishments. However, the news industry has changed significantly in recent years, with a greater emphasis on ready-made online news sources.

While the District takes advantage of some of these opportunities by distributing press releases through its social media (the blog, Facebook, Twitter), staff has identified a need to update its media outreach strategies through the development of a Central Basin News Bureau pilot program.

With the assistance of Coghlan Consulting Group, this three-month pilot program will result in a combination of print and video stories written and produced by experienced journalists that will be distributed through an internet news service that is certified by Google News, in addition to traditional methods such as the website, email blasts, etc. Through the internet news service, stories will appear on the front page of Google News for keywords such as “water conservation,” or “recycled water,” and will be picked up immediately by reporters using the service.

Positive and consistent news coverage is critical to maintaining a positive public image, and can help position the District to receive future government funding. By distributing ready-made articles in this way, the online news service promises to help increase positive news stories written on issues, programs and events important to Central Basin.

To date, no other California water agency is using online media tools in this way. Given the unique and innovative utilization of an internet news service to distribute actual news, staff recommends entering into a contract agreement with Coghlan Consulting Group, for an amount not-to-exceed \$34,500, plus a 10% contingency. Coghlan Consulting Group possesses the specialized knowledge of these new technologies and their applications, as well as vast experience working with the local, state and national media.

FISCAL IMPACTS:

Funding for this pilot program is available in the FY 2010-11 Budget.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE:

Not applicable.

COMMITTEE STATUS:

This item was reviewed by the Communications Committee on November 4, 2010 and was recommended for approval at the November 10, 2010 Special Board meeting.

RECOMMENDED MOTION:

That the Board authorizes the General Manager to enter into a three-month agreement with Coghlan Consulting Group for the amount of \$34,500, plus 10% contingency for a total not-to-exceed amount of \$37,950.

LIST OF EXHIBITS:

Exhibit "A" - Proposed "Scope of Work"

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To: Art Aguilar, Central Basin Municipal Water District

From: Ed Coghlan

Re: Pilot Project--The CBWD "News Division"

September 14, 2010

OVERVIEW:

The Central Basin Municipal Water District works to meet the water needs of 2 million people in Southern California by working with cities, retail agencies and community based groups. It has spawned many innovative and successful solutions to conservation, education and water quality issues facing its service area.

Central Basin is still a very young agency that is building its brand among the various stakeholders in its service area. Those stakeholders include the general public, state and local elected officials, cities, community based organizations, other water agencies and, of course, its own employees.

Water Quality and Water Conservation:

Central Basin obviously aspires to (and in many cases has already achieved) a leadership position in the area of water quality and water conservation. These are two areas that "central" to the agency's mission.

Interestingly, those two terms are also included in a tremendous amount of news coverage. In fact, a recent search in Google News under the terms "*California Water Quality*" and "*California Water Conservation*" each returned a large number of stories (1,570 and 831 respectively). And yet, there were relatively few stories about Central Basin using those Keywords. There are a number of ways to remedy that. One way is to increase the effort at publicizing the agency through additional press releases, while increasing a focus on Keywords. Another is to create more news stories about the agency.

CBMWD News Division:

All of us know that getting positive news coverage about the Agency is a very difficult challenge. With news staffs reduced (and often inexperienced) it is difficult to create stories that speak to the accomplishments of Central Basin. The solution? How about our own news outlet.

A member of the Coghlan Consulting Group has been designated as a Google News Channel, which means that it is one of the sites that Google searches each day for content. It is, in old media terms, like a weekly newspaper that is constantly in need of fresh and relevant content. The "publisher" of that site (newshawkreview.com) understands that the topics that Central Basin wishes to promote (i.e. water quality and water conservation) are also topics that Google News has demonstrated an interest in.

We have seen some other efforts at hiring/contracting former news people to write "stories" for the website and for other distribution. A recent point in case is the Los Angeles Kings hockey team which has hired former reporter Rich Hammond to write stories about the Kings. His stories look like, are researched and written as new stories. Obviously he is being paid by the Kings, but this "insider information" is written in the image of real news.

We propose a similar effort for Central Basin. This would not preclude press releases and other external communication efforts, but rather would be in addition to. I have spoken with news photographers, news editors and other journalistic contacts who have indicated they would like to be part of this team.

Because the website that we would be placing this is part of the Google News family, these stories would show up as news stories (both English and Spanish language) on the internet.

Distribution:

It cannot be emphasized strongly enough that having a news story on the internet is not an end all for the Agency. These stories need also to be distributed through your normal channels via email and web site blasts to other key stakeholders and influencers, including your own Board members, other MWD agencies, local and regional elected officials, community based organizations and your own employees.

While the Communications Department may wish to conduct this "push" itself, our group is ready to help with and even manage how you get these stories out to your target audiences. Interesting stories that have been published on a Google News Channel have a greater chance of being picked up by the mainstream media. This potential for "viral" coverage of Central Basin is high value exposure.

Content:

What can be done? Our "news bureau" will perform the following tactics:

- Take the Keywords and use them in promoting news story categories and article subjects
- Produce 1 news story per week for a 12 week trial period
- There will be 8 print and four television stories and they will be distributed to the Google News Channel and, in the case of television, to the Google News Video Reporter Channel (YouTube)
- The stories will be about people!!! We will focus on those who are benefiting from the programs, educational programs that are teaching people how to conserve etc, projects that young people are doing in schools etc. These are not press releases about meetings etc, but more in the vein of news that consumers would find interesting and worth reading
- Will alert Partner Website and ask for Embed of Video News Story
- Will distribute to major internal article directories for publication

At the end of three months we will discuss whether this tactic is working to help build awareness of Central Basin among key constituencies and decide whether it has value to continue.

Social Media Marketing:

Central Basin obviously already has demonstrated that it understands the importance of social media marketing, and our team can be of assistance if needed to expand and update some of the social media marketing, Facebook Fan Page, Twitter and Linked-In Campaigns.

Budget:

90 day Pilot Project--October-December 2010

\$11,500/month

Product and Services Include:

4 person team

Consultative Services

Production of stories

Conceive Stories

Writing

Editing

Distribution (English Language)*

Google News

Proprietary PR Sites

Distribution (Spanish Language)

Translate stories and place on appropriate Spanish language web media **

*We expect that CB would distribute these stories to their website and to their stakeholders/partners via an email blast as well to update all Social Media Marketing outlets itself. If it is deemed those duties should part of this effort, we will discuss additional budget parameters.

**Further investigation of Spanish language web media opportunity is underway.



Central Basin
Municipal Water District

APRIL 25, 2011- Board Meeting

Prepared by: Valerie Howard

Submitted by: Valerie Howard

Approved by: Art Aguilar

ACTION CALENDAR

MEDIA OUTREACH UPDATE

SUMMARY:

In November 2010, the District entered into a three-month agreement with Coghlin Consulting Group to develop and launch the Central Basin News Division Pilot Program. Given the tremendous success of this online News Division Pilot Program, staff recommends expanding the program for one year.

Since November, the program has proven to be an ideal supplement to the District's traditional media outreach, which includes press release distribution, media interviews and the use of social media (the blog, Facebook and Twitter). Since the start of the pilot program, at least one article has been written per week, as well as corresponding media talking points and countless articles for the District's blog.

All articles are written and produced by experienced journalists and are distributed online through an internet news service certified by Google News. In developing the articles, the writers monitor current events and news daily to look for possible story angles. These stories then appear immediately on the front page of Google News and are viewable by reporters and the public.

The establishment of Central Basin's own News Bureau has enabled the District to take advantage of the changing media industry, where a greater emphasis has been placed on ready-made news sources, and where the public is increasingly turning to the internet for daily news. In addition, since using this service the District has seen a significant increase in daily website traffic to its website and blog.

By distributing ready-made articles in this way, the online news service has already helped to increase positive news coverage written on issues, programs and events important to Central Basin. Looking to next year, positive and consistent news coverage will continue to be critical in maintaining a positive public image and dispel misleading or damaging misinformation about key projects.

No other California water agency is using online media tools in this way. Given the proven success of the pilot program, staff recommends extending the current agreement with Coghlin Consulting Group for a one-year period, for an amount not-to-exceed \$138,000, plus a 10% contingency. Coghlin Consulting Group is comprised of a team of professional journalists and writers who have the unique and specialized

knowledge of these new technologies and their applications, as well as vast experience working with the local, state and national media.

FISCAL IMPACTS:

Funds in the amount of \$22,000 are available for this program in the FY 2010-2011 Budget. The remaining \$129,800 will be included in the FY 2011-12 Budget for Board approval.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE:

Not applicable.

COMMITTEE STATUS:

This item was not reviewed in the Communications Committee on April 7, 2011 due to information not being available.

RECOMMENDED MOTION:

That the Board authorizes the General Manager to enter into a 1-year agreement with Coghlan Consulting Group for the amount of \$138,000, plus 10% contingency for a total not-to-exceed amount of \$151,800.

LIST OF EXHIBITS:

Exhibit "A" - Proposed "Scope of Work"

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To: Valerie Howard, Central Basin

From: Ed Coghlan, Edward F. Coghlan Consulting

Re: Creating a Permanent News Division

April 13, 2011

Background:

The recently concluded pilot project for the Central Basin News Division demonstrated that a media interest exists in water issues that are important to Central Basin. The project called for twelve stories during the three month pilot project, we found that topics like the supply of water, the conservation of water, the important of groundwater protection created an opportunity to easily meet the goal of a story per week.

Stories were developed that included direct Central Basin programs, state political and resource development that we able to tie in a Central Basin point of view, national and international news events that affect water policy in a direct or in-direct way.

In addition, we were able to contribute posts to the Central Basin blog, some of which we were able to distribute more widely through Google News, as well as contribute other writing projects including copy for an advertorial for a Central Basin newspaper ad and question and answer copy regarding the groundwater management study that is underway.

By constantly monitoring news wires for related stories, we gave the Public Affairs Department additional sets of "eyes and ears" . Because our focus is on external communications and developments, we were able to communicate quickly with the Public Affairs Department which in turn would give direction to capitalize on stories by developing Central Basin that were not previously part of the Public Affairs/Communications efforts.

We believe that continuing this project, with some added value in working on expanding the digital news reach of Central Basin, can continue to create value for the District in its Public Affairs and Communications efforts.

Scope:

We propose a year-long contract that provides the following to the District:

1. 4 Stories Per Month on the following issues and opportunities:
 - Groundwater Management
 - Urban Groundwater Plan
 - Education
 - Conservation
 - Community Outreach
 - Developed stories tied to state and national issues
 - Stories that develop at Monthly Board Meetings and Central Met Meetings
 - Other topics as directed by Public Affairs
2. Blog Posts for "The Water Cooler"
3. Other Writing and Communication Projects as Mutually Agreed Upon (e.g advertorial/talking points)
4. Expand Digital News Reach by updating and expanding the reach of CB's social media outlets including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube Channel and the Water Cooler.

Cost:

The monthly fee will remain at \$11,500, with additional duties (specifically helping with the expansion of social media outreach) included.

*Costs of Video Production, if any, will be separately estimated and billed.